

PUBLISHERS

Larger Than Death

He spoke with neither resignation nor despair. But there was pride in a long lifetime of accomplishment, and his voice rang with the dauntless curiosity of an old man facing the diminishing future. "This is my final word," said William Maxwell Aitken, the first Baron Beaverbrook, at his 85th birthday party (TIME, June 5). It was, indeed, his valedictory. Last week at Cherkley, his gloomy Victorian estate in Surrey, the Beaver's heart, which had endured so long despite bouts with asthma, sciatica and gout, finally failed.

From longtime admirers and antagonists tributes flowed in for the man who

BEAVERBROOK ART GALLERY



SUTHERLAND'S BEAVERBROOK
Faith was a battle flag.

a unique and indispensable stamp on British history. "I am deeply grieved at the loss of my oldest and closest friend," said Winston Churchill. "The Daily Telegraph," said that paper "found itself on the opposite side of almost every major argument in which he and his newspapers engaged. But there was never any disputing the deep impact which he had upon his times." Wrote the Times: "He was that increasingly rare phenomenon in a standardized age, a personality quite uncramped by convention or inhibition."

Dragooning a Voice. "Journalism is the most fascinating of all professions," Beaverbrook once wrote, "and if I had my time over again, I would give my whole life to it." But nearly half his life lay behind him when he bought the London Daily Express in 1916, not to turn journalist but to dragoon a public voice for his political ambitions. The self-made Canadian multimillionaire aspired to nothing less for himself than a tenancy at No. 10 Downing Street, nothing less for England than perpetuation of the British Empire. Rich dreams were glimmering. He could take a strong hand in changing British governments,

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and did three times, but he never headed one himself. He could thunder the cause of Empire in the pages of the Express, but the cause was doomed.

There were compensating rewards. The Express, a pale failure when Beaverbrook bought it, grew under his kinetic stewardship into a popular giant of 4,300,000 circulation; its pages provided all Fleet Street with daily lessons in the craft of journalism. When World War II began, Britain's Finest Hour was also his; as Churchill's Minister of Aircraft Production, he put up the cloud of Spitfires that saved the day. These and other accomplishments invested him with the quality of living legend. "Positive, bee," wrote a columnist in a Canadian paper, "comparative, Beaver; superlative, Beaverbrook." Sir Beverley Baxter, M.P. and once an Express managing editor, called him a cross "between a magician and an avalanche."

No Cease-Fire. Neither praise nor censure concerned the Beaver much. "Fire and be damned! That's what I believe," he told a recent visitor. It was an article of his faith, one that he carried like a battle pennant every foot of the way that led from the Presbyterian minister's manse in Newcastle, New Brunswick, where he spent his youth. Conscious of his place in Britain's history, he wrote a dozen reminiscent books as an obligation to posterity, and had more in progress when he died. "I belong to the past," he had said recently.

But he could not bring himself to cease firing. And, like the activist he was, he overruled three times his self-announced retirement—the first time in 1927—and stayed on as master of the Express to the end. "My son," said Beaverbrook recently, "will do better after I am gone."

How to Capture a Press Lord. Son Max Jr., 54, will have his hands full, even though the four papers* he inherited are carefully insulated from Britain's crippling death duties by a private trust set up years ago. "It won't make any difference to the papers," said their new proprietor of his father's death. They will continue with the same policies. I will be at the head of them. Then he added that he was renouncing the crest that would otherwise have passed to him on his father's death. "The title was earned and won by my father," he said. "Certainly in my lifetime there will be only one Lord Beaverbrook."

It was, in a way, the same sort of solution chosen by Artist Graham Sutherland when the Beaver commissioned a portrait ten years ago. How to capture the essence of the intransigent press lord? Sutherland finally settled for painting his subject just as the Beaver's friends and enemies had seen him: a little larger than life size.

* Besides the Daily Express, they include the Sunday Express, which is a separate paper, the London Evening Standard and the Glasgow Citizen.